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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001936

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: UNT LOBBIES EU, PLANS MEETING WITH OAS TO RAISE
CONCERNS ABOUT CHAVEZ' CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

REF: CARACAS 001913

CARACAS 00001936 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT RICHARD DOWNES,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Former presidential candidate Manuel Rosales and Un Nuevo Tiempo (UNT) party leaders are actively sharing their concerns about the anti-democratic nature of Chavez' proposed constitutional changes with foreign governments and the OAS. Zulia Governor Rosales briefed 13 European Ambassadors in Caracas September 27; the ambassadors appeared most concerned about the potential economic impact of Chavez' constitutional package. UNT leaders tell us that OAS SecGen Insulza has agreed to receive them sometime in October. Rosales will also seek meetings with senior USG officials while in Washington. While conceding they have an uphill struggle to defeat Chavez' reform package in a December 2 public referendum, opposition activists want Chavez to pay a political cost internationally for concentrating even more power in his presidency. End Summary.

Rosales Briefs European Ambassadors

¶2. (SBU) Zulia Governor Manuel Rosales, accompanied by UNT Secretary General Gerardo Blyde and UNT International

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Coordinator Timoteo Zambrano, briefed 13 ambassadors from EU member states September 27 at the Portuguese Embassy in Caracas. After the meeting, Rosales told the local media that he stressed that Chavez' proposals to change 33 articles of the 1999 Constitution would eliminate political pluralism. "Whoever is not a socialist will be excluded and will be violating the (new) constitution," said Rosales. The former consensus opposition presidential candidate publicly urged European and other countries to use their diplomatic influence to promote solutions that will end "abuses" and restore the balance of power among government branches in Venezuela.

¶3. (C) UNT International Coordinator Zambrano told Poloff that the European ambassadors were most interested in UNT's analysis of the potential economic impact of Chavez' proposed constitutional changes. They were particularly concerned about the possible dilution of constitutional protections of private property and potential affects on existing European

investments in Venezuela. Zambrano said the European Ambassadors did not appear to be as concerned about Chavez' proposals to eliminate presidential term limits and concentrate more power in the presidency at the expense of state and local governments.

UNT Asks for Observers

¶4. (C) Finnish Ambassador Mikko Pyhala told PolCouns that the UNT specifically requested that the European Union mount an electoral observation mission (EOM) for the constitutional referendum planned for December 2. Pyhala said the European ambassadors told Rosales that it would be difficult for the EU to do. The EU mounted EOMs during the 2005 parliamentary and 2006 presidential elections; the BRV has largely ignored the EU's electoral recommendations.

UNT to Visit Washington

¶5. (C) Zambrano also told Poloff that Un Nuevo Tiempo (UNT) has asked for a meeting with OAS Secretary General Insulza to raise the party's concerns about Chavez' constitutional reform package. Insulza has agreed to a Washington meeting with Rosales and other UNT leaders sometime in October, perhaps on or about October 12, but his staff has not yet confirmed the date. Zambrano said Rosales would also seek meetings with senior USG officials while he is in Washington.

A group of 400 Venezuelan civil society leaders led by former Venezuelan Ambassador to the UN Milos Alcalay and other former Venezuelan ambassadors separately sent a letter to OAS SecGen recently to urge the OAS and its member states to consider Chavez' proposals a violation of the OAS Inter-American Democratic Charter.

CARACAS 00001936 002.2 OF 002

Comment

¶6. (C) UNT leaders and other opposition party leaders privately concede that they are unlikely to defeat Chavez' constitutional reform package in a public referendum slated for early December (Reftel). UNT leaders are more hopeful that their concerted efforts to educate the international community about the anti-democratic nature of Chavez' constitutional reform will undermine Chavez' international image. Other opposition parties, such as Primero Justicia, have been less active internationally, but are considering trying to do more international outreach. Meanwhile, the BRV, through its embassies, foreign assistance programs, and National Assembly delegations, is reportedly deploying abroad additional resources in defense of Chavez' constitutional package.

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